FOFEIGN INTERCOURSE: EXTENSIVE COMMERCE WITH VARIOUS SECTIONS OF THE ASIATIC WORLD AND RENEWED CONTACTS WITH EUROPEANS

It may be an indication of the practical-mindedness of the Ming age that during much of its history foreign trade flourished and that the Chinese often went actively forth to encourage it. This was particularly true in the early, vigorous years of the dynasty. We have seen how, under Yung Lo[7] naval expeditions were sent to lands to the south. Chinese carried on trade with Java, Sumatra, India, Siam, Ceylon, parts of what is now French Indo-China, and with lands even farther to the southwest. However, Chinese ships were later restricted, by imperial command, to coastal waters. With the Land of the Rising Sun, too, there was active trade. It was the means of bringing many Chinese products and much Chinese thought to Japan. For example, during part of the Ming the chief circulating medium in Japan was Chinese copper coins, and Chinese philosophy continued influential.

Before the dynasty had ended, moreover, those contacts with the Occident had begun which eventually were to work the greatest cultural revolution in China's history—infinitely greater than that wrought by the Mongols and Manchus and more thoroughgoing even than that which followed the coming of Buddhism. Commerce with Europe, it must be noted, was due to the initiative of Westerners and not to Chinese enterprise. At the time, this fresh touch with the Occident did not appear nearly so significant as did some other events, and the Manchu rule was more than

two-thirds over before it had resulted in any very important changes in Chinese civilization. Because of its outcome in our own day, however, it must here be chronicled.

After the fall of the Mongols, no Europeans appear to have come to China, and the little Christian communities which might have perpetuated their influence seem entirely to have disappeared. However, in the latter part of the fifteenth century, the expansion of European peoples of which the merchants and missionaries of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were a foreshadowing began afresh and with increased energy and rapidity. It was in the last decade of that century that daring